

The Advisory Working Group on the Parliamentary Translation Services of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration has the honour to present its

FIRST REPORT

On September 21, 2017, the Advisory Working Group on the Parliamentary Translation Services was established. The following five (5) senators are its members: Senator Ringuette (chair), Senator Joyal, Senator Maltais, Senator Wallin and Senator Mockler.

Your advisory working group (AWG) was given the mandate to review the Service Agreement for Language Services with the Translation Bureau of Public Services and Procurement Canada in order to improve the service level and the quality of the translation and interpretation services offered to the Senate.

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATIONS

The members of your AWG firmly believe that ensuring a high quality of translation and interpretation services for the Senate must be given the utmost priority because the *Constitution Act, 1867*, the *Constitution Act 1982* and the *Official Languages Act* all contain provisions allowing senators to express themselves in English and in French and mandating the availability of simultaneous interpretation.

The Constitution also provides that both the English and French texts of laws are equally authoritative. It is therefore essential that senators understand exactly what is being proposed and see how specific proposals will be translated before making a final determination on legislative measures.

Finally, the members of your AWG would also like to highlight that the lack of high quality translation and interpretation services for the Senate also affects the rights of Canadians. It is their opinion that the Senate has a constitutional duty to make services of equal quality available to the public in both official languages. Words matter; the Senate must do what it can to ensure that no matter what language is originally used, its publications and broadcasts reflect the very best translation and interpretation available so that all Canadians have equal access to the entire context of the debate and to its nuances.

WHAT THE COMMITTEE HEARD

Survey and Results

Your AWG began its work by surveying senators, their staff and committee clerks to ascertain their level of satisfaction with the services that they were receiving from the Translation Bureau. Fourteen (14) senators, six (6) clerks and four (4) senators' staff members replied and provided your AWG with examples of problem areas requiring attention.

The survey revealed that most senators, staff and committee clerks appreciate the services delivered by the Translation Bureau and that for the most part, they are satisfied. The respondents acknowledged that the work that the translators and interpreters are asked to perform is not easy and that turnaround times are sometimes very tight and do not allow for a proper revision to take place. Some issues with both translation and interpretation did, however, come to light.

Many of the respondents cited inconsistency and quality control as major issues when it came to translation. The quality of the service varies greatly from one translator to another and there are often errors in the translations even when a request for a secondary review is made. Some respondents noted that the two language versions of committee reports often do not convey the same meaning and that, in some cases, the translation is simply erroneous. Much time is reportedly spent by senators and staff reviewing the documents in question and ensuring that the translation is accurate. Other respondents reported that longer documents that had been translated by more than one individual were disjointed and difficult to read because a common style had not been

used. Recommendations ranged from the need to hire specialized translators to facilitate the translation of committee reports on technical matters, to ensuring proper revision of translations before their delivery, and to the need to provide for a feedback mechanism that could be used to alert the Translation Bureau when errors were detected.

Issues related to the quality of interpretation were also raised. Some senators reported hearing literal translations that did not convey the true meaning of what the speaker had said. Others noted that regional expressions were not properly interpreted. Many respondents asked if it would be possible to have the same interpreters covering the Chamber and specific committees as this would ensure continuity. The need to upgrade the Senate's technological equipment was raised as devices in some committee rooms did not work properly. Some committee clerks noted that a more modern way for clerks to provide material to the interpreters was needed. Such technological upgrades could make communication of information quicker and more efficient.

Many of the respondents provided concrete examples of the issues raised above. Your AWG shared the results of the survey with the Translation Bureau's management team so that they could better appreciate the nature of the complaints that the AWG had received.

Witness testimony

Your working group held four (4) meetings and met with representatives from the Translation Bureau of Public Services and Procurement Canada on three (3) occasions and with representatives of the International Association of Conference Interpreters once.

The Translation Bureau has a new Chief Executive Officer. M. Stéphan Déry and his management team (Mr. Matthew Ball, Acting Vice-President, Mrs. Josée Cardinal, Director, and Mrs. Julie Poirier, Chief Quality Officer) have made themselves available to your AWG and have been receptive to the comments and suggestions made by senators and their staff.

M. Déry informed your AWG that improved client service is the Bureau's top priority. He noted that the Minister of Public Services and Procurement's mandate letter specifically refers to the quality of the Bureau's services¹. He was optimistic that this renewed emphasis on the importance of the Bureau and the services it provides would give him the political support he needed to modernize the Bureau and restore its prestige.

The Translation Bureau's management team informed your AWG that since the current government took office, the Bureau has experienced a 40% increase in demand for linguistic services for Parliament. This is due to an increase in the number of Parliamentary committees requiring interpretation and the increase in demand for translation of committee transcripts. He explained that the Bureau's translators and interpreters are a mixture of permanent employees and contract workers. The Bureau, he said, is doing what it can to hire the number of translators and interpreters that it needs to handle the increased workload, but it faces some challenges with regards to interpreters as there is a shortage of workers in that field. M. Déry noted that the Parliament of Canada's standards are also very high and that exams needed to be passed before an interpreter could become accredited.

Your AWG inquired about the differences between the service levels provided to the House of Commons and to the Senate. M. Déry noted that the biggest difference was with regard to interpretation. The House of Commons has set teams of interpreters for the Chamber while the Senate does not. Your AWG was told that the transition to set interpretation teams for the Senate Chamber was planned to coincide with the move to the Government Conference Centre.

M. Déry and his team are aware of the need to track the error rate and to provide better mechanisms by which clients can provide feedback. They are also aware of the need for better quality control. Though they already have a quality assurance process in place for interpretation as well as for translation services, they are working on modernizing the system and ensuring continued dialogue with clients to ensure that their needs are being met. The management team is

¹ The Minister's mandate letter requires her to "continue to implement reforms that will: enhance the quality and capacity of services delivered by the Translation Bureau and promote the economic vitality of Canada's translation and interpretation community..."

also seeking opportunities to communicate with senators directly to hear their points of view and to share tips and best practices that could help translators and interpreters provide an optimum service.

M. Déry has provided your AWG with a list of suggestions that could ensure a better working relationship with the Translation Bureau. His proposals include regular working-level meetings with the Senate administration, semi-annual information sessions for newcomers to Parliament and networking sessions for parliamentarians and interpreters. He is also working on the creation of a feedback process for senators, the integration of a client relations team to ensure the monitoring of client issues and the collection of data regarding error rates. He also told your AWG that he and his management team are committed to promptly handling complaints and reporting back to this committee as required. The Bureau is seeking approval of their proposed way forward and look forward to building a strong relationship with the Senate.

Your AWG also met with Mrs. Nicole Gagnon of the International Association of Conference Interpreters and her colleague Mr. Jim Thompson. They spoke of the need for the Senate to have set teams of interpreters for the Senate Chamber. They informed the senators that the Senate is often used as a training ground for new interpreters. They also noted that the House of Commons had an administrative assistant to coordinate the work of interpreters while the Senate did not. One of the interpreters has to perform that role every sitting day. Mme Gagnon explained the difficulties that interpreters experience working in the Senate's current interpretations booths. She noted that they often work long shifts in rooms devoid of proper air circulation. The lack of proper resting facilities that allow for workers to continue listening into debate is also an issue. She asked the members of your AWG to ensure that the set-up at the Government Conference Centre was well-designed and equipped with the latest technology. These witnesses also pointed out technological issues in Senate committee rooms, specifically related to teleconferences. Interpreters have a difficult time hearing the audio of witness testimony when the witness is appearing via teleconference. This makes their job very difficult and affects the quality of the interpretation.

Finally, Mr. Thompson and Mrs. Gagnon informed the members of your AWG that the assignment of interpreters is made on the basis of the lowest daily rate and not on the basis of experience and relevant knowledge. They urged your AWG to insist that the Government of Canada only use accredited interpreters for work related to government departments and agencies.

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE AWG'S LAST MEETING

Since your AWG last met, the members of the Translation Bureau's management team have been actively working to address the complaints raised by senators and staff. They have reviewed the list of errors and examples that were provided to them and have reported to your AWG with the results of their analysis. They have taken steps to strengthen their relationship with the Library of Parliament. They have also taken steps to create a mechanism through which senators and staff could easily provide feedback to the Translation Bureau.

Your AWG is pleased with the steps that have been taken so far and are confident that, with better lines of communication and a regular reporting schedule, the concerns that have been expressed by senators will be dealt with and that the institution will be well served by the Translation Bureau.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of this, your AWG makes the following recommendations:

1. That the committee direct the Senate Administration to designate a manager responsible for ensuring that the terms of the Service Agreement for Language Services between the Senate of Canada and the Translation Bureau are respected;

2. That the committee direct the Senate Administration to:
 - a. assist the Translation Bureau in perfecting their feedback process for senators, Senate committees and for the Senate Administration, using the Library of Parliament's system as a guide;
 - b. set up regular work-level meetings with the Translation Bureau to discuss ongoing issues, review error-rate data and the handling of complaints, and ensure that the services rendered to senators and to the Senate by the Translation Bureau meet the highest standards; and
 - c. report to the responsible Senate manager on issues requiring attention.
3. That the committee meet with the Senate manager responsible for the Service Agreement yearly to monitor progress and discuss any issues that require attention.
4. That the committee urge the Minister Public Services and Procurement to provide the Translation Bureau with any additional resources required to ensure that capacity is there to meet the demands of the Senate.
5. That the committee urge the Translation Bureau to assign set translators to Senate committees to ensure continuity and the development of specialized vocabulary and that these translators be encouraged to attend meetings where draft reports are being discussed;
6. That the committee encourage the Translation Bureau to shift to set teams of interpreters for the Senate Chamber as soon as possible;
7. That the committee encourage the Translation Bureau to study the possibility of having set teams of interpreters for Senate committees;
8. That the committee ensure that the physical space provided for interpreters in the new Government Conference Centre meet the needs of the Translation Bureau and that the most modern technology be available to facilitate their work;
9. That the committee ensure that the most modern technology is available to facilitate the work of interpreters in the Senate's committee rooms;
10. That the committee urge the Translation Bureau to assign the interpretation work according to experience and relevant knowledge and not according to the lowest rate.
11. That the committee present this report to the Senate for adoption and that a government response be requested.

Respectfully submitted,


PIERRETTE RINGUETTE
Chair